

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 9402

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MPOL, NATO, SP, BE

SUBJECT: JOINT SPANISH-BELGIAN MINESWEEPER EXERCISING

REF: MADRID 7156

1. PARAGRAPH 1C REFTEL REPORTED THAT SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR NORTH AMERICAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS DURAN EXPRESSED HIS PLEASURE AT PROSPECT FOR RENEWAL IN 1977 OF JOINT SPANISH-BELGIAN MINESWEEPER EXERCISES AFTER A LONG HIATUS. BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS PROVIDED US WITH BACKGROUND ON THESE JOINT EXERCISES.

2. IN 1971, THE SPANISH MILITARY ATTACHE IN PARIS, WHO WAS ALSO ACCREDITED TO BELGIUM, VISITED BELGIAN NAVY INSTALLATIONS
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INCLUDING MINE WARFARE SCHOOL AT OSTENDE. AS A RESULT OF HIS

VISIT, THE BELGIAN NAVY INFORMALLY MADE ARRANGEMENTS FOR WHAT BECAME AN EXCHANGE OF SHIP VISITS AND JOINT EXERCISES. BELGIAN NAVY MINESWEEPERS EXERCISED IN SPANISH WATERS IN 1971, 1972 AND 1973, THE LATTER BEING A JOINT BELGIAN-SPANISH EXERCISE IN THE VICINITY OF PALMA DE MALLORCA FROM FEB. 26 TO MARCH 2. TWO SPANISH MINESWEEPERS VISITED OSTENDE FROM JUNE 26-30, 1972. IN 1974 THE SPANISH NAVY HAD PLANNED TO SEND SHIPS TO OSTENDE AGAIN, BUT QUESTIONS WERE RAISED IN THE BELGIAN PARLIAMENT AND THE BELGIAN PRESS SEVERELY CRITICIZED SUCH COOPERATION BETWEEN THE SPANISH AND BELGIAN NAVIES. IT WAS THUS THOUGHT BETTER ON BOTH SIDES TO SUSPEND FURTHER VISITS AND JOINT EXERCISES.

3. WITH THE FAVORABLE EVOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SPAIN, THE BELGIAN NAVY IS NOW CONSIDERING RENEWING ITS CONTACTS WITH THE SPANISH NAVY. IT IS WORKING UP A PROPOSAL TO INCLUDE THE SPANISH NAVY IN AN INVITATION TO SEVERAL NAVIES TO VISIT OSTENDE IN 1977. THE OFFICIAL INVITATION AND LIST OF INVITEES HAS NOT YET BEEN PASSED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY FOR APPROVAL. WHEN IT IS, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WILL PROBABLY ACCEPT THE IDEA OF SPANISH PARTICIPATION IN THE INVITATION TO VISIT OSTENDE. OUR NAVAL ATTACHE EXPECTS THAT THE BELGIAN NAVY PROGRAM FOR 1977 VISITS WILL HAVE BEEN FINALIZED BY DECEMBER 1976 AND WILL REPORT THROUGH HIS CHANNELS WHEN THE PROGRAM BECOMES AVAILABLE. FIRESTONE

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